



EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP COMMUNICATION:

The Skills and Practices That Build a High-Performing Culture

Introduction

What's the difference between a message being sent and a team being truly **aligned**? The answer is leadership communication that builds shared understanding and drives consistent action. Best-in-class leaders reach the right people with the right message at the right time: whether they're communicating strategy, priorities, change, culture, expectations, or what "good" looks like day to day. At its core, effective leadership communication intentionally shares information to inspire, guide, and align teams toward common goals, using the channels and habits leaders use to deliver clarity and build confidence.

IN THIS ARTICLE, YOU'LL LEARN:

- ▶ Why leadership communication is critical to business performance and culture
- ▶ The core skills effective leaders rely on
- ▶ Best practices for building a leadership communication strategy that scales

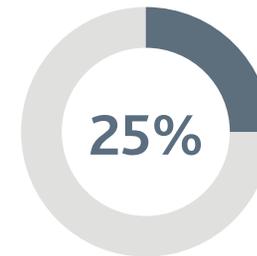
You'll also see supporting data and insights from BDO's 2025 Winning on the People Side of Business™ research, plus practical guidance grounded in BDO's Human, Compelling, Visual Communications™ framework.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ **Communication is a performance lever:** Clear leadership communication helps improve alignment, reduce breakdowns in collaboration, and support productivity and retention.
- ▶ **Employees say it's essential—yet under-delivered:** In [BDO's research](#), 95% of all respondents (and 98% of individual contributors) say effective communication is important for a high-performing culture but only 25% of individual contributors strongly agree their company communicates well.
- ▶ **Use a repeatable approach:** Apply [Human, Compelling, Visual Communications™](#) to make your messages easier for people across the organization to understand, trust, and act on.



Individual contributors that say effective communication is important for a high-performing culture



Individual contributors that strongly agree their company communicates well

Why Leadership Communication Matters

Effective leadership communication is a direct lever for business performance because it strengthens alignment, reduces collaboration breakdowns, and speeds execution.

A [2025 Axios report](#) found that only 9% of employees feel fully aligned with their organization's goals but among those who do, 60% say the leadership communication they receive is effective. Research frequently cited in workplace studies also shows 86% of employees and executives attribute workplace failures to [poor communication or collaboration](#). In addition, companies with effective internal communication practices produce [stronger business results and organizational stability](#).

BDO's 2025 Winning on the People Side of Business research reinforces why this matters culturally: employees cite communication more than any other factor in creating a high-performing culture—yet many individual contributors don't feel their organizations are delivering it consistently. That gap is where leaders often lose trust, momentum, and adoption.

Bottom line: to strengthen culture and performance, leaders need communication that employees can quickly absorb, believe, and act on—especially across layers and channels.



A Leadership Communication Framework That Works: Human, Compelling, Visual Communications™

Organizational communication is more than just a transfer of information. It is the primary way employees experience leaders, cultures, and priorities of the business. BDO's communications consulting approach centers on Human, Compelling, Visual Communications:

HUMAN

Communications that are human leverage the natural ways people receive information, understand context, and build authentic connections. They use simple, direct, jargon-free language, strike a balance between brevity and meaning, and feel as though they're coming from a real person.

What this looks like in practice:

- ▶ Acknowledge what employees may be experiencing (pressure, uncertainty, change fatigue)
- ▶ Share what you know, what you don't know yet, and when you'll follow up
- ▶ Reduce noise; prioritize what matters most right now

COMPELLING

Communications that are compelling are designed to inspire, inform, build knowledge, and call audiences to action. They situate employees in the right context; are clear about what you want people to know, feel, and do; and broadcast the "so what?" behind the message.

What this looks like in practice:

- ▶ Lead with the headline: what changed/what matters/ what happens next
- ▶ Make the "why" concrete (customer impact, risk, growth, mission)
- ▶ End with clear actions and support resources

A reusable structure leaders can use:

- 1. Context:** what's happening and why now
- 2. Priority:** the decision or direction
- 3. Impact:** what changes (and what doesn't)
- 4. Action:** the 1-3 things to do next
- 5. Support:** where to go for help, tools, FAQs

VISUAL

Communications that are visual build connection and alignment faster than words alone. They help audiences visualize organizational change, connect the dots between ideas and programs, and bring messages to life.

Why visual matters:

- ▶ **Neuroscience shows** that creative visual content sparks memory encoding 74% faster and generates significantly more emotional engagement than dull alternatives.
- ▶ **Over 95% of content leaders** consider visual content critical in their business and rely on it for key communications.
- ▶ Design-led companies **consistently outperform** their text-heavy peers on clearer communication, stronger brand cohesion, and sharper market differentiation.

What this looks like in practice:

- ▶ A one-page visual summary
- ▶ A simple roadmap graphic during change
- ▶ Manager toolkits with visuals + FAQs to reduce message drift across layers

5 Critical Leadership Communication Skills (and How to Practice Them)

Organizations have different cultures and communication norms, but these skills consistently show up in effective leaders across industries.

1. Empathy

Empathy means understanding what your people are experiencing and how your message will land. Empathetic leaders take the emotional context seriously, especially during change, uncertainty, or high workload periods. In practice:



- ▶ Consider what may be worrying or distracting your team before you communicate.
- ▶ Ask questions and listen for what isn't, as well as what is being said.

2. Authenticity

Authentic leadership communication is transparent, human, and consistent with your values. People trust leaders who sound like themselves, and who don't hide uncertainty behind corporate language. In practice:



- ▶ Share lessons learned, not only wins.
- ▶ Say what you know, what you don't know yet, and when you will follow up.

3. Storytelling

Storytelling makes information memorable and actionable. People [retain stories far more easily](#) than abstract facts, and stories help teams understand **why** work matters. In practice:



- ▶ Explain the impact through a specific example.
- ▶ Use a simple structure: context > challenge > action > result > takeaway.

4. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the alignment between words and actions. Teams watch whether leaders follow through, acknowledge concerns, and communicate consistently under pressure. In practice:



- ▶ Build predictable two-way communication (Q&A time, office hours, feedback loops).
- ▶ Close the loop with visible actions like responding to feedback respectfully.

5. Simplicity

Simplicity is clarity. Leaders who communicate simply reduce confusion and help teams prioritize. Clear communication also scales better across large or distributed organizations. In practice:



- ▶ Lead with the headline: what changed, what matters, what happens next.
- ▶ Reduce jargon by using visuals when a timeline process is complex.

3 Best Practices for Building an Effective Leadership Communication Strategy

Great leadership communication is repeatable. These practices make it easier to sustain over time.

1. Know your audience (and communicate by segment)

Different groups need different contexts and levels of detail. Segment messages by role, function, location, or level of change impact. This can improve relevance, reduce noise, and help ensure the message lands consistently.

2. Begin with the end in mind.

Before you communicate, define the outcome:

- ▶ What do they need to **know**?
- ▶ How do you want them to **feel**?
- ▶ What do they need to **do** next?

3. Build a plan that matches message-to-channel

Communication often breaks down due to channel mismatch or information overload. A simple plan helps you choose:

- ▶ The right amount of information
- ▶ For the right groups
- ▶ Via the right medium
- ▶ At the right cadence

Don't skip the step that builds credibility: closing the loop. Share what you heard, what changed (or didn't), and why.

LEADER INSIGHTS

Several business leaders say they struggle with communicating effectively. A core challenge is determining the right amount of information, for the right groups, via the right medium—especially when messages must travel through many layers.

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Employees are feeling they're not getting the information they need to do their job. You can only imagine how many layers information needs to transfer down through to reach a frontline worker—and it doesn't always make it.

**CHIEF HUMAN
RESOURCES OFFICER**

Leaders often forget that communication is a two-way street.

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We've got to go back on a regular basis and say, 'Here's what we heard you say. Here is what we committed to do or have done based on your input' ... Actions have to match words for there to be trust and credibility.

**FORMER FORTUNE 250 CHRO
AND HR EXECUTIVE**

Conclusion: Effective Leadership Communication is a Culture Multiplier

For leaders, communication isn't part of the job — it is **the** job. [BDO's research](#) makes the opportunity (and the risk) clear: effective communication is the most cited driver of a high-performing culture, yet only a small share of individual contributors strongly agrees their organization is doing it well.

Leaders who utilize [Human, Compelling, Visual Communications™](#) can narrow that gap, improving clarity, trust, and execution across the organization.

Want to strengthen leadership communication across your organization?

[BDO's People Strategy & Solutions professionals](#) can help assess communication effectiveness, equip leaders and managers with practical tools, and build communication rhythms that improve clarity and adoption.



FAQ

WHAT IS LEADERSHIP COMMUNICATION?

Leadership communication is the intentional way leaders share information to create clarity, build trust, and align teams on priorities—so people understand what matters, why it matters, and what to do next.

WHY IS EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION CRITICAL TO HIGH-PERFORMING CULTURE?

BDO's 2025 Winning on the People Side of Business™ research found that 95% of respondents (including 95% of individual contributors) say effective communication is important for a high-performing culture—and employees cite communication more than any other factor. Yet only 25% of individual contributors strongly agree their organization is doing a good job communicating, highlighting a significant expectations gap.

WHAT IS HUMAN, COMPELLING, VISUAL COMMUNICATIONS™?

It's BDO's framework for designing communications that land:

- ▶ **Human:** simple, direct, jargon-free communication that balances brevity and meaning
- ▶ **Compelling:** clear context and "so what" with a call to action (know/feel/do)
- ▶ **Visual:** content that helps people understand faster and align sooner through strong visual communication.



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Turn communication into a culture multiplier.

Engage BDO's People Strategy & Solutions team to strengthen leadership communication and accelerate execution across your organization.

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